



Women in Africa's development

Overcoming obstacles, pushing for progress

By **Takyiwaa Manuh**

African women's fundamental contributions in their households, food production systems and national economies are increasingly acknowledged within Africa and by the international community. This is due, in no small part, to African women's own energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard. At both grassroots and national levels, more women's associations have been formed during the 1990s, taking advantage of the new political openings to assert their leadership roles. They are also pressing for an expansion of women's economic and social opportunities, and the advancement of women's rights. By improving their own positions, they are simultaneously strengthening African society as a whole, as well as enhancing the continent's broader development prospects.

But women in Africa continue to face enormous obstacles. The growing recognition of their contributions has not translated into significantly improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers. Neither has the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural and social lives of their communities through their associations and informal networks been channeled into creating new models of participation and leadership.

"Africa is overflowing with women leaders," notes Ms. Soukeyna Ndiaye Ba, President of Women's Development Enterprise in Africa, a Dakar-based non-governmental organization (NGO). "They lack only the training and the means to

bloom." This highlights the next big step needed for advancing the position of women in Africa: strengthening their capacities and skills and expanding the opportunities for women to more fully develop their leadership roles.

Beyond such political challenges, the material conditions under which most women live and work continue to deteriorate in many countries due to economic and social decline,

Rebuilding in South Africa: women's contributions to African economies are increasingly recognized, but more opportunities are needed for women to fully develop their leadership roles.



Photo: Margaret M. Venter

wars and conflict, and the spread of AIDS. Women constitute the majority of the poor and the illiterate in both urban and rural areas in Africa and many young women between the ages of 15 and 25 have been pushed into sex work and face the risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

Against this background, over 3,000 women converged on Dakar in 1994 to attend the African Women's Preparatory Conference. They came to articulate an African position for the Beijing Fourth Women's World Conference. The resulting African Platform for Action identified several priorities. These included combatting the increasing poverty of African women; improving women's access to education and health services, with a special focus on reproductive health; addressing women's relationship to the environment; increasing the

involvement of women in the peace process; advancing the legal and human rights of women; highlighting the special concerns of the girl-child; and "mainstreaming" gender concerns within economic and development policy-making by disaggregating data along gender lines. The Dakar conference also noted the emergence of numerous women's groups and NGOs in Africa and the increasingly concrete expression of their organizational potential.

The Beijing conference that followed in 1995 stressed the empowerment of women as one of the central development goals of the 21st century. It adopted a Platform for Action which called for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies and programmes, including development programmes. It committed countries to design their own specific programmes and activities in consultation with women's groups and other NGOs to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

A March 1997 survey by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) found that only 10 African countries had drawn up action plans. A more hopeful indication was the September 1997 signing of a Gender Declaration by the leaders of the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) at their meeting in Malawi. The declaration commits member states to eradicate gender inequalities in the region; mainstream gender in

Women, which guarantees women equal rights and protection from discrimination, these have not informed policy-making or translated into better living and working conditions for women. This hampers Africa's development by excluding the

perspectives, skills and dynamism of half the population. Without meaningful commitment in the form of policy changes and the provision of resources to deal with the root causes of women's conditions, Africa cannot hope to see a breakthrough in its development and renewal.

Within the international development community, there has been a

shift in thinking from the initial "women in development" (WID) approach, which focused narrowly on women's productive roles, to a broader "gender and development" perspective, which takes into account all spheres of women's lives and seeks to bring gender analysis into the core of development policy (see box, page 3).

UN agencies such as the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) support gender awareness training for policy-makers in Africa, provide technical assistance and build strong gender components into their own

programming and projects. Similarly, the Commonwealth Secretariat has commissioned several studies on gender and economic policy-making and applies a gender perspective to analyze the effectiveness of governmental policies and public services. The World Bank also emphasizes the developmental costs of ignoring women and denying them access to key resources, and urges countries to draw up gender action plans.

However, the severe economic constraints that African countries face tend to undercut these new emphases and shifts

'If you want to develop Africa, you must develop the leadership of African women.'

— Ms. Soukeyna Ba,
Senegal



Micro-credit scheme for women in Morocco: special financing facilities are essential for women, who lack access to most formal credit institutions.

all SADC activities; create a standing committee of ministers responsible for gender affairs; and set up focal points dealing with gender in all sector coordinating units as well as a gender unit in the SADC Secretariat.

Despite such positive moves, there has been insufficient political will and sustained commitment to meeting the needs and interests of women by local authorities and governments. While many countries have ratified UN agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against

in approach. The continuing poverty of the majority of African countries, declining terms of trade and the burden of external debt create an unfavourable environment for development. Of the limited resources available, little is directly allocated to women. In addition, structural adjustment policies pursued for nearly two decades by African governments in conjunction with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have had important gender consequences. Governments' macroeconomic policies do not incorporate

gender perspectives in their design and ignore the structure of households in Africa and the social relations that influence women's roles in production.

I. African women in their societies

Among the majority of rural and low-income urban dwellers, women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. They seek to manage the environment, although their struggle for survival often results in environmental damage from activities such as fuel-wood collection.

Many rural and urban women belong to women-only mutual-aid societies, benevolent groups in churches, cooperatives and market women's groups. Some of these groups allow women to pool resources to reduce their workload and to invest in savings societies or cooperative ventures. Cooperative societies have provided women access to resources, for example, the Corn Mill societies in Cameroon, the "Six S" associations in Burkina Faso and the General Union of Cooperatives in Mozambique, which supplies most of Maputo's fruits and vegetables. In Benin only 8 per cent of rural women belong to formal cooperatives, but an estimated 90 per cent participate in traditional women's savings and credit groups. Informal rotating credit associations in Ghana, Tanzania, Gambia and Zimbabwe have been used by the estimated 25 per cent of economically active women in the non-agricultural informal sector to invest in businesses and farms, home improvements and school costs for their children.

While today women rarely have the same access to resources as men, in the past some resources were available to them, especially land. Wives in many societies were not fully economically dependent upon their husbands. Women had their own age-grade associations and leaders and wielded power in spheres regarded as exclusively feminine, guaranteeing them some leverage in political processes and allowing them to negotiate with men. Through their involvement in the birth and care of children, some women developed extensive knowledge of herbs and healing

powers and had important religious roles and achieved fame and recognition.

Women's power and spheres of influence largely disappeared under the impact of colonialism and external religions, which upset existing economic and social complementarity between the sexes. New "customary" laws on marriage created in response to men's anxieties about the independence of women transformed the previously fluid and negotiable relations between them into rigid duties and obligations of wives and women. Women came to be regarded as primarily dependent on men, making it unnecessary to plan and provide for their needs; they were to work in the fields and home to produce food and other crops to support their men, who worked in visible, documented activities. Finally, the introduction of new forms of

Shifting views of women and development

Over the past 20 years, discussions on African women have been influenced by the prevailing currents within development thinking. From the early 1970s, Ms. Ester Boserup's pioneering *Women's Role in Economic Development*, the work of female development professionals and UN agencies noted the important roles that women play in agricultural economies, compared with the low or negative impact of development policies on their status and access to resources. This led to efforts to better integrate women into development processes, within a framework that saw societies in the South gradually "modernizing" along lines similar to those of the industrialized North. The emphasis of this "women in development" (WID) perspective was on women's productive roles, fueled by a belief that by simply improving women's access to technology, credit and extension services, women's productivity would increase and this would positively influence the development process. Critics of the WID perspective argued that it failed to take into account women's reproductive roles and ignored the larger social processes that shape women's lives.

A closely related approach was known as "women and development" (WAD). Derived from a political economy perspective, it focused on the relationship between women and development processes, rather than on strategies for integrating women into development, noting that women have always been important economic actors in their societies. Like WID, however, the WAD viewpoint concentrated on the productive sector, at the expense of the reproductive side of women's work and lives.

The "gender and development" (GAD) approach emerged in the 1980s, as an alternative to WID. It links relations of production to those of reproduction, thus taking into account all spheres of women's lives. Like WID, this perspective aims at economic efficiency. However, unlike WID, it is not preoccupied with women per se, but with the social realities that shape views of sex and assign specific roles, responsibilities and expectations to women and men. Through gender analysis, it focuses attention on the differences and constraints under which men and women work, using those insights to tailor policies and programmes that will improve overall productivity. Using the language of economics and efficiency to help deliver resources to women, gender analysis is seen as a non-confrontational approach to planning.

However, the GAD perspective also has some critics. Some argue that by focusing on what separates women and men, it neglects the social relations that also connect them, as well as how changes may be brought about in men's and women's respective roles. In addition, by not emphasizing social relations sufficiently, it has been argued, the GAD perspective cannot explain how powerful gender relations can subvert the impact of resources directed at women or adequately identify women's interests and what trade-offs they are willing to make to fulfill their ideals of motherhood or marriage.

Based on: Shahrnashoub Razavi and Carol Miller, From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourses. Geneva: UN Research Institute on Social Development, Occasional Paper 1, 1995.



A health clinic in Benin: maternal and infant mortality rates in Africa remain the highest in the world.

marriage that granted enhanced property and inheritance rights to a minority, increased the dependence of the majority of African women on men.

Women shared initially in the promises of independence and saw gains in their access to education, formal sector employment, health care and nutritional profiles; their life expectancy at birth rose from 37 to 50 years by the end of the 1960s. But development plans continued to be formulated and implemented without an adequate understanding of women's contributions to African economies. Women were also absent from formal positions of decision-making and power. Even in countries like Zimbabwe and Guinea-Bissau, where women had participated in armed struggles for national liberation, they have tended to be marginalized and few have attained formal positions of power or gained rights to land and resources in their own names.

Causes of deterioration

Women's lives in most countries have been profoundly affected by three main developments since the onset of economic and social decline in the 1970s and 1980s:

First, the structural adjustment programmes implemented in many countries across Africa since the early 1980s have emphasized demand management and supply-oriented measures narrowly focused on export-led growth and efficiency, often to the detriment of social welfare. They also have introduced liberalization of trade regimes and of the financial sector, as well as privatization and reduction in the role of the state in economic life. Because of their specific roles and position within society, women have been among the worst affected by cuts in social sector spending, where substantial costs have been shifted from the state to the household. As a consequence, women have been forced to take on an increasing burden of unpaid work in caring for the sick, obtaining food and ensuring the survival of their families more generally.

Second, there has been increased civil strife and conflict. The

majority of the estimated 8.1 million refugees, displaced persons and post-conflict returnees in Africa in 1997 were women and children. War and conflict have increased violence against women and worsened the social and economic conditions under which they live.

Third, many African countries are grappling with the AIDS crisis, high and increasing rates of HIV infection and the costs in human lives. Just over half of the estimated 20 million cases of HIV in Africa are female. In Africa the main route for infection

is through heterosexual intercourse and through the placenta from an infected mother to her unborn child. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of power over their sexuality and reproductive functions.

Marriage, households and women's welfare

About 50 per cent of women in Africa are married by age 18 and one in three women is in a polygamous marriage. Estimates of average total fertility rates in Africa were 5.7 children per woman in 1995, although some Southern African countries, as well as Kenya and Mauritius, have begun to see declines. High fertility arises from the economic value of children, high infant mortality and low levels of contraceptive use. Children's labour is crucial inside and outside the home and has increased with ongoing economic crisis and environmental change. Also, it is as mothers that women secure claims in their marital homes and to their husband's assets.

While married, women may still live with their kin groups or in conjugal domestic units. Women head about 31 per cent of households in urban and rural areas across Africa, often with no working resident males.

In many rural areas, women contribute unpaid labour to the household's agricultural production and spend up to 50 hours a week on domestic labour and subsistence food production, with little sharing of tasks by spouses or sons in the household. Studies have documented that women work 12-13 hours a week more than men, as the prevalent economic and environmental crises have increased the working hours of the poorest women.

In some areas, women may have separate access to land and work independently in farming or in some other income-generating activity. But in general they have fewer opportunities to earn income. They combine their unpaid labour with independent production to meet the needs of their families and to attain some measure of autonomy and self-reliance. Their income is indispensable for family survival regardless

of the presence of men, since the system of allocation and distribution within many African households usually imposes individual responsibilities on men and women to meet their personal needs. Women are expected to actively generate the means to meet the daily expenses for themselves and their children, but also may receive loans or advances from their husbands to set up petty trading operations.

With the decline of national and local economies, many men have been unable or have refused to contribute their share of household expenses. This has increased household pressures on women, raising the numbers of women living in poverty and the numbers of households in the poorest categories headed by women.

For women's welfare and production to be improved, planners and funding agencies need to pry open what has been called the "black box" of the household, by taking into account intra-household differences in resource use and control. While men may control more resources and earn higher incomes, this does not translate into improved family or household welfare. Rather, women's incomes and spending patterns are better indicators of the welfare of household members, since women spend more of their increased earnings on food, medicine and education for their children and other dependents. Improving women's incomes becomes both a matter of equity and a prerequisite for child survival and welfare.

II. Women in economic life

A. Mainstay of rural production

Women provide the backbone of the rural economy in much of sub-Saharan Africa. About 80 per cent of the economically active female labour force is employed in agriculture and women comprise about 47 per cent of the total agricultural labour force. Food production is the major activity of rural women and their responsibilities and labour inputs often exceed those of men in most areas in Africa. Women also provide much of the labour for men's cultivation of export crops, from which women derive little direct benefit. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found, in a survey of nine African countries in 1996, that women's contribution to the production of food crops ranges from 30 per cent in Sudan to 80 per cent in the Republic of Congo, with estimates for other countries tending toward the higher end of the scale. Women are responsible for 70 per cent of food production, 50 per cent of domestic food storage, 100 per cent of food processing, 50 per cent of animal husbandry and 60 per cent of agricultural marketing.

Women also have taken advantage of new opportunities to

produce vegetables for urban markets on fringe land using highly labour-intensive practices. Where social practices of female seclusion prevent them from working outside the home, as in parts of Nigeria and Ethiopia, they engage in food processing and trade with the assistance of young girls.

Women have benefitted from technological advances in food processing, such as cassava processors, fish smokers and oil pressers. Cassava processors, introduced by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in some Nigerian villages, have reduced labour time through more efficient processing, bringing gains in women's incomes. According to Dr. Lukas Brader, Director-General of the IITA, "If Africa is to develop a more productive, sustainable, and equitable agricultural sector, it cannot afford to neglect women." Moreover, he adds, the

constraints that women face must be addressed if agriculture is to be the engine of economic growth.

Access to land

The first of these constraints is access to land. Across Africa, agricultural intensification, population growth and economic change have led to substantive shifts from common property systems of tenure towards more centralized resource control. In the process, women and poorer people generally have lost out. An FAO "synthesis report" on nine countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) showed that women rarely own land and when they do, their holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than those of men.

Where land reform schemes have been introduced, they often have displaced complex systems of land use and tenure in which women had certain rights in common law and local practice, if not in legislation. New land titles usually have been registered in the name of a male household head, regardless of women's economic contribution to the household, their customary rights or the increasing number of female-headed households.

As a result of "women in development" and NGO activities, some women have been granted land to start communal gardens from which they generate income. When these gardens are visibly remunerative, women's continued access rights become vulnerable and subject to encroachment by male landowners. In parts of northern Ghana, land that women have carefully tended has been taken away, leaving them with less fertile and more distant plots. The low incomes and increased uncertain-

Percentage of women in economic activity



Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank data

ties and risks that women face in their production activities, compounded by the lack of access to land, is pushing many of them out of traditional agriculture.

The labour bottleneck

Labour is also a bottleneck for female farmers, as men have left rural economies in search of more viable livelihoods and women have lost access to male help on farms or the money they may have previously provided. In countries like Lesotho, Botswana and Burkina Faso, the out-migration of adult males is very high, influencing the sexual division of labour for those left behind. The only means for most women to increase their yields is through even harder work, using more labour-intensive methods to maintain soil regeneration and fertility. Where technical innovations such as irrigation techniques have made more than one cropping season possible, as in many parts of the Sahel, increased women's labour has been crucial in meeting the intensified work demands.

But women have not simply accepted increasing demands on their labour time. As examples from rice development schemes in Gambia, Cameroon and Nigeria have shown, women often have bargained with men to increase what they get in exchange for the labour they expend on family fields.

National offices for women

Over the years, national offices for women have been set up in a number of African countries, but many face problems that have hampered their effectiveness. Their location in low-priority ministries and departments, such as sports and social development, have often diluted their purpose. Few have received sufficient budgetary allocations or the requisite numbers of well-trained personnel to carry out their work. Yet issues affecting women span a broad range — from agricultural and credit policies to political action on women's behalf — requiring considerable expertise and clear institutional links to be able to influence policy, implementation and monitoring, and to obtain feedback.

But few women's offices possess staff with the necessary technical expertise, inter-disciplinary training and political clout. Together with the lack of official commitment to dealing with issues affecting women, this has resulted in these offices' marginalization and ineffectiveness. When they have managed to attract funding for projects for women, these have tended to be short-term and discrete, often targeted at improving women's incomes or introducing small-scale technologies to them. With structural adjustment programmes and the reduction of government spending in some areas, women's offices have faced cuts. Many have virtually disappeared. In a few countries, political NGOs such as the Better Life for Rural Women in Nigeria and the 31st December Women's Movement in Ghana, run by First Ladies, have taken over the functions of the national offices and attracted government and multilateral funding.

National offices have important advocacy and monitoring roles to perform and need to be strengthened and equipped. In conjunction with the emerging associations of media women, educators, lawyers and women working for peace, they can work to influence national politics and development processes in favour of women.

Credit and other inputs

In addition to land and labour, women face problems of access to other inputs, including credit, technology, extension services and agricultural training and marketing. Many credit associations and export-crop marketing cooperatives limit membership to household heads in many countries, thereby excluding most married and unmarried women. Banks demand collateral in the form of landed property and male approval before making loans to women, while men

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often have been reluctant to support women's applications. Most resources and technical assistance have been channeled to men growing export crops, with improved seeds and tools going to larger commercial farmers, almost invariably men. Only 5 per cent of the resources provided through extension services in Africa are available to women. "although, in some cases, particularly in food production, African women handled 80 per cent of the work. Of total extension agents at work in Africa today, only 17 per cent are women," notes Ms. Marie Randriamamonjy, director of the Women in Development Service of the FAO.

Food security in Africa cannot be assured without improving the situation of women producers. Women have shown themselves to be ready to take advantage of new opportunities. Evidence from a World Bank study in Kenya suggests that if women had the same human capital endowments and used the same production factors and inputs as men, the value of their output would increase by some 22 per cent. Given women's key roles in food production, if these results from Kenya hold for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, then simply raising the productivity of women to the same level as that of men would increase total production by 10-15 per cent, eliminating a key constraint to food security.

Unfortunately, some of the obstacles that women farmers confront have been worsened by the impact of structural adjustment programmes. By placing greater emphasis on export crops, which usually are grown by men, the domestic terms of trade have tended to shift against food production, where women predominate. Few women farmers market enough of their own produce to benefit from higher producer prices, while the increased acreage devoted to export and other cash crops also has increased labour demands on women.

B. Women's employment

Analysis of women's employment in Africa is constrained by unreliable data, as well as by problems in

defining what constitutes economic activity for women, particularly in the agricultural and informal sectors. Ongoing economic crises and the gulf between job creation and the growth in the numbers of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and men alike. But women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, child-bearing and child-care, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities.

*Women
are the
backbone of
Africa's rural
economy,
accounting
for 70 per
cent of food
production.*



The formal sector

According to UNDP, women are two-thirds less likely than men to get waged employment, while only 3 out of 10 women in the labour force in sub-Saharan Africa are paid employees. In 1990, about 5 per cent of the female labour force worked in industry, 20 per cent in services, 23 per cent in sales, and only 6 per cent in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions.

Employees in both the public and private sectors earn steady, albeit low, incomes. They also work to predictable schedules, in contrast to the self-employed, who are more insecure and who often must make substantial investments in time and energy. Despite International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, to which many African countries are signatories, there are significant income disparities, with women earning half or less of the incomes of men in some countries. Many women also do not benefit in practice from formal laws and policies guaranteeing maternity protection or equal pay for equal work.

Data from the ILO and other sources suggest that women's formal sector participation rates dropped from 57 per cent in 1970 to 53 per cent in 1990, with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1985 and 1990. In Benin, to cite just one example, women accounted for 26 per cent of retrenched workers, although they were only 6 per cent of formal sector workers; women had predominated in the lower echelons of the social services sector, which faced the heaviest budget cuts. Many of such retrenched women have relocated to the informal sector.

The informal sector

The non-agricultural informal sector employs about 25 per cent of the female labour force, mainly in petty trading and

home-based processing and manufacturing, where they have little access to official sources of credit or information. Congestion and lack of water and sanitation create a hazardous environment for both the women and the children they must take with them to work (because no other childcare is available). These women workers also do not benefit from minimum wage and social security provisions and have to provide for their own health and retirement needs. Many are subject to harassment and exploitation from municipal authorities.

With the contraction of formal sector jobs, the informal sector has become a "safe haven" for both men and women because of its low capital requirements and ease of entry. For the majority of women, participation in the informal sector is a survival strategy as they take over aspects of household maintenance that men can no longer afford, although they tend to face stiff competition from new entrants, including men who have lost or cannot obtain formal sector employment. Many girls have been withdrawn from school to assist their mothers or guardians in informal sector activities.

The informal sector has shown some dynamism in creating new jobs. In Zimbabwe, for example, it is estimated that job creation in the informal sector may average 25,000 to 35,000 a year. The sector also provides needed linkages among small-scale manufacturers, promotes labour-intensive production processes and integrates local and regional markets. Informal sector workers have built associations to protect their interests and mobilized traditional savings and credit schemes to offer sources of capital for women. In Nairobi, Kisangani and Accra, rich women traders have used their profits to build houses to rent out; a few have crossed over into the formal sector, in importing, manufacturing and commerce.

In general, however, women's lack of access to affordable credit, information, technical advice and services prevents them from expanding their enterprises. The sector is characterized by low productivity and disguised unemployment.

Providing credit, information, services and infrastructure to

Profile of women in African countries

	% Women economically active	% Men economically active	Women as % of adult labour force	Women in adult labour force, % by sector 1995			Female-headed households, %	Fertility rate 1986-95	Contraceptive use* % 1986-95	Maternal mortality rate, (per 100,000 live births) 1990	School enrolment as % of age group 1993				Adult literacy rate 1995		Admin. & managerial employees, % 1985-1995	Women as % of parliamentarians 1986	Women as % of government** 1995
				Agriculture	Industry	Services					Primary	Female	Male	Secondary	Female	Male			
Algeria	24	76	24	10	21	69	11	3.5	52	160	96	111	55	66	49	74	6	6.6	4.8
Angola	73	90	46	87	2	11	n.a.	6.9	n.a.	1,500	87 ^a	95 ^a	n.a.	n.a.	29 ^c	56 ^c	n.a.	9.5	4.9
Benin	75	83	49	64	4	31	21	6.0	16	990	44	88	7	17	26	49	7	7.2	14.9
Botswana	65	83	46	78	3	19	47	4.4	33	250	120	113	55	49	60	80	26	8.5	13.5
Burkina Faso	77	90	47	85	4	11	7	6.7	8	930	30	47	6	11	9	29	14	3.7	11.5
Burundi	83	93	49	98	1	1	25	6.5	7	1,300	63	76	5	9	22	49	13	n.a.	5.4
Cameroon	48	86	37	64	4	32	19	5.7	13	550	84 ^a	93 ^a	22 ^a	32 ^a	52	75	10	12.2	4.5
Cape Verde	44	88	39	14	31	54	38	3.6 ^b	n.a.	n.a.	130 ^a	132 ^a	26 ^a	28 ^a	64 ^c	81 ^c	23	11.1	11.1
Central African Rep.	69	87	47	63	5	31	19	5.1	15	700	n.a.	92	n.a.	n.a.	52	68	9	3.5	4.9
Chad	67	88	44	80	2	19	n.a.	5.9	n.a.	1,500	30	62	n.a.	n.a.	35	62	n.a.	17.3	4.3
Comoros	63	87	42	84	3	13	32	6.0	21	950	69 ^a	81 ^a	17 ^a	21 ^a	50 ^c	64 ^c	0	0	2.7
Congo, Rep.	58	83	43	83	2	15	21	6.0	n.a.	890	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	67	83	6	1.6	6.5
Congo, Dem. Rep.	62	85	43	92	2	6	16	6.7 ^b	8	870	58 ^a	78 ^a	15 ^a	33 ^a	33 ^c	60 ^c	9	5.3	3.4
Côte d'Ivoire	44	88	32	62	8	30	16	5.3	11	810	58	80	17	33	30	50	n.a.	8.3	7.1
Djibouti	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	80	8	12	18	5.8 ^b	n.a.	570	33 ^a	43 ^a	10 ^a	15 ^a	68 ^c	87 ^c	2	0	0.9
Egypt	33	79	29	8	20	71	13	3.4	47	170	89	105	69	81	39	64	12	2.0	4.0
Eq. Guinea	45	88	35	82	3	15	n.a.	5.9 ^b	n.a.	820	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	68 ^c	90 ^c	2	8.8	4.9
Eritrea	75	87	47	80	8	12	n.a.	5.8 ^b	5	n.a.	43 ^a	54 ^a	13 ^a	19 ^a	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	21.0	7.8
Ethiopia	58	86	40	80	8	12	16	7.0	4	1,400	19	27	11	12	25	45	11	2.0	8.9
Gabon	63	84	44	84	3	13	n.a.	5.2	n.a.	500	136	132	n.a.	n.a.	53	74	n.a.	n.a.	7.7
Gambia	69	90	44	91	3	6	n.a.	5.3	12	1,100	61	84	13	25	25	53	15	n.a.	18.9
Ghana	81	82	50	50	17	33	37	5.1	20	740	70	83	28	44	53	76	9	n.a.	9.6
Guinea	78	87	47	84	6	9	13	6.5	2	1,600	30	61	6	17	22	50	n.a.	7.0	13.0
Guinea-Bissau	57	91	40	91	2	7	n.a.	6.0	n.a.	910	42 ^a	77 ^a	2	10	42	68	8	10.0	11.9
Kenya	74	89	46	82	4	14	33	4.7	33	650	91	92	23	28	70	86	n.a.	3.0	5.8
Lesotho	47	85	37	86	3	11	n.a.	4.6	23	610	105	90	31	21	62	81	33	4.6	14.6
Liberia	54	84	39	82	2	16	19	n.a.	6	560	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	22 ^c	54 ^c	11	5.7	7.0

	% Women economically active	% Men economically active	Women as % of adult labour force	Women in adult labour force, % by sector 1995			Female-headed households, %	Fertility rate	Contraceptive use* %	Maternal mortality rate, (per 100,000 live births)	School enrolment as % of age group				Adult literacy rate		Admin. & managerial employees, % 1985-1995	Women as % of parliamentarians	Women as % of government**
				Agriculture	Industry	Services					1993		Secondary		1995				
											Female	Male	Female	Male	Women	Men			
Libya	23	78	21	32	15	54	n.a.	6.4 ^b	n.a.	220	110 ^a	110 ^a	95 ^a	95 ^a	63 ^c	88 ^c	n.a.	n.a.	3.4
Madagascar	69	89	44	92	2	6	22	5.8	17	490	72	75	14	14	32 ^c	60 ^c	n.a.	3.7	1.8
Malawi	79	87	49	92	3	5	26	6.6	22	560	77	84	3	6	42	72	8	5.6	4.3
Mali	72	90	46	75	4	21	13	6.8	7	1,200	24	38	6	12	23	39	20	2.3	6.2
Mauritania	64	87	44	82	4	14	n.a.	5.2	3	930	62	76	11	19	26	50	8	1.3	5.4
Mauritius	36	80	31	24	16	60	18	2.2	75	120	106	107	60	58	79 ^c	87 ^c	17	7.6	9.8
Morocco	40	79	34	27	46	28	15	3.4	50	610	60	85	29	40	31	57	n.a.	0.6	0.9
Mozambique	83	91	49	97	1	2	n.a.	6.2	n.a.	1,500	51	69	6	9	23	58	11	25.2	12.8
Namibia	54	81	41	47	3	50	39	5.0	29	370	138	134	61	49	91	91	21	18.1	11.4
Niger	70	93	44	92	0	8	10	7.4	4	1,200	21	35	4	9	7	21	8	n.a.	10.9
Nigeria	48	87	36	67	7	26	n.a.	5.5	6	1,000	82	105	27	32	47	67	6	n.a.	6.2
Rwanda	83	94	48	98	1	2	25	6.2	21	1,300	76	78	9	11	52	70	8	17.1	10.7
Sao Tome & Prin.	37	77	34	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	33	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	42 ^c	73 ^c	9	7.3	7.7
Senegal	61	86	42	87	3	10	16	5.7	13	1,200	50	67	11	21	23	43	4	11.7	5.6
Seychelles	57	79	42	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	86 ^c	83 ^c	29	27.3	20.8
Sierra Leone	44	84	35	78	4	17	11	6.5	n.a.	1,800	42 ^a	60 ^a	12 ^a	22 ^a	18	45	8	6.3	5.9
Somalia	63	87	43	87	2	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,600	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	14 ^c	36 ^c	n.a.	n.a.	0
South Africa	46	79	37	13	17	70	n.a.	3.9	50	230	110	111	84	71	82	82	19	25.0	7.0
Sudan	33	86	28	84	5	11	13	4.9 ^b	8	660	48 ^a	61 ^a	19 ^a	24 ^a	35 ^c	58 ^c	2	5.3	1.7
Swaziland	41	80	37	78	4	18	40	4.8 ^b	20	560	119 ^a	125 ^a	51 ^a	53 ^a	76 ^c	78 ^c	14	3.1	7.5
Tanzania	83	89	49	89	2	9	22	5.8	18	770	69	71	5	6	57	79	n.a.	17.5	9.6
Togo	53	87	39	64	8	28	26	6.4	12	640	81	122	12	34	37	67	8	1.2	3.0
Tunisia	35	79	30	47	44	10	11	2.9	60	170	113	123	49	55	55	79	9	6.7	7.9
Uganda	81	91	48	85	3	12	29	6.7	15	1,200	83	99	10	17	50	74	n.a.	18.1	8.9
Zambia	66	86	45	82	3	15	17	5.7	26	940	99	109	19 ^a	31 ^a	71	86	6	9.7	8.4
Zimbabwe	67	86	45	80	4	16	33	3.8	48	570	114	123	40	51	80	90	15	14.7	11.6

Sources: UN Africa Recovery from: UN Statistical Division; World Bank, World Development Report 1997; UNDP, Human Development Report 1997; UNICEF, State of the World's Children 1998.

NOTES:

n.a. data not available or not applicable

a 1990-95 data

b 1994 data

c 1995 data

* Married women of reproductive age

** Ministerial and sub-ministerial positions

the informal sector would enhance its productivity, thus supporting women's efforts to maintain their families and provide services to farmers, artisans and other producers.

III. Women and social services

A. Education and training

Lack of access to formal education and training has been identified as a key barrier to women's employment and advancement in society. In Africa, female illiteracy rates were over 60 per cent in 1996, compared to 41 per cent for men. Certain countries have extremely high rates: Burkina Faso at 91.1 per cent, Sierra Leone at 88.7 per cent, Chad at 82.1 per cent and Guinea at 86.6 per cent. Literacy classes for women appear to have limited impact, while programmes linked to income generating activities have been most successful.

In many African countries, parents still prefer to send boys to school, seeing little need for education for girls. In addition, factors such as adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and girls' greater burden of household labour act as obstacles to their schooling.

While most girls do not go beyond primary education, school curricula have not been guided by this reality and their

content is not geared to helping girls acquire basic life skills. The curriculum also is suffused with gender biases and leads girls into stereotypical "feminine" jobs in teaching, nursing and clerical work. Few women are found in scientific or technical education where they could develop better skills to secure better paying jobs.

There have been improvements in the net enrolment of girls at primary levels, but disparities persist in comparison with the enrolment of boys. Female enrolment numbers decrease as girls move up the education ladder (see table). Exceptionally, in Southern Africa, the out-migration of men has led to a very different pattern of gender representation in the education system. Lesotho provides the most striking case, with females accounting for more than 75 per cent of students, even in higher education.

Prospects for increasing the access of women and girls to education have been undermined by economic crisis, budgetary cuts, and debt servicing burdens. Average per capita education spending declined from \$41 in 1980 to only \$26 in 1985 and was \$25 in 1995. Meanwhile the proportion of foreign aid allocated to education declined from 17 per cent in 1975 to 9.8 per cent in 1990, increasing slightly to 10.7 per cent in 1994.

Cuts in state spending on education have led to a slower rate of increase in gross enrolment rates, while drop-out rates for girls have risen as they have been withdrawn from school in response to new fees and "user charges," and other economic factors. In 1993, only about 40 per cent of school-age girls were enrolled in primary or secondary school.

The teaching profession shows a similar level of female participation. In 1993, women accounted for 30 per cent or less of primary teaching staff in 13 African countries, while their proportions in secondary schools remained at 33 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa between 1985 and 1994. Women are largely absent in technical fields, with the exception of home economics and secretarial courses, depriving girls of needed role models.

Studies have shown that a woman's education beyond primary school is a reliable route to economic empowerment and long-term change in the status quo, as well as a determinant of a family's health and nutrition. Education beyond ten or more years of school is also a reliable predictor of lower fertility, improved infant survival, reduced maternal mortality and enhanced levels of infant and child development and educational attainment. However, the current economic and policy situation, combined with socio-cultural factors, threaten any real advances in the education of women and girls. New administrative arrangements and partners must be found to support their education and make it more consistent with their needs.

Training programmes are needed to help women develop their technical competence, argues Ms. Ba of Women's Development Enterprise in Africa, "to enable them to be bet-

Gross enrolment ratios*

	1980	1989	1992-93
PRIMARY SCHOOL			
Sub-Saharan Africa**			
Females	64	62	61
Males	85	79	76
North Africa			
Females	70	40	88
Males	97	51	104
All Africa			
Females	65	57	70
Males	87	72	85
SECONDARY SCHOOL			
Sub-Saharan Africa			
Females	9	n.a.	24
Males	18	n.a.	28
North Africa			
Females	32	n.a.	56
Males	49	n.a.	67
All Africa			
Females	14	n.a.	31
Males	25	n.a.	37

* All pupils enrolled, regardless of age, as a percentage of the primary or secondary school aged population.

** Excluding South Africa.

Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank data.

ter informed, better infiltrate the political and economic structures....and help them gain the maximum competence and means."

B. Health and sanitation

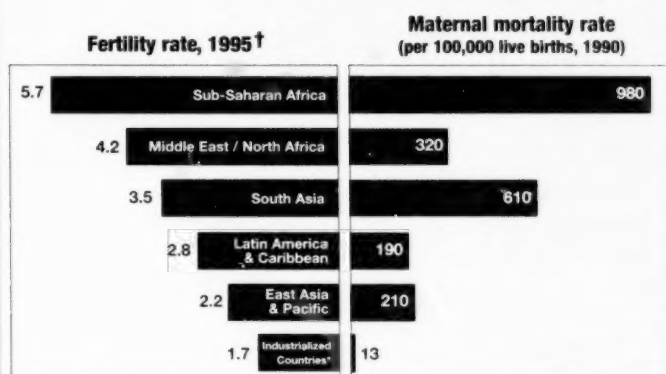
For women, as for men, inadequate potable water, sanitation and waste disposal in urban and rural areas in Africa leave populations vulnerable to water-borne and other environmental diseases. Malaria, lung and other respiratory diseases are still major killers in Africa.

These conditions are compounded for women by some unhelpful or even dangerous religious norms and practices centred on their reproductive and productive functions, their heavy workloads, high birth rates and socio-cultural factors that limit their dietary intake. Maternal and infant mortality remain high. Up to 40 per cent of pregnant women in many countries have no access to antenatal care, while the percentage of births attended by trained personnel has declined. Benin, Botswana, Lesotho and Mauritania have recorded some improvements as a result of maternal and child health programmes, while Ghana recently announced that free health care for pregnant women is to be introduced in an attempt to reduce the current high maternal mortality rates of 214 per 100,000 births.

In 1994 the infant mortality rate in Africa was estimated at 92 deaths per thousand. High infant mortality, the opposition of male partners and religious and cultural factors result in levels of contraceptive use of only around 15 per cent.

The health of women and girl-children is also jeopardized by female genital mutilation (FGM). It is estimated that about 2 million girls are subjected to the practice each year, with over 80 per cent of women in Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti,

Better reproductive health care vital for African women



† Average number of births per woman

* Referred by World Bank as high-income countries

Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank and UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1998 data

Ethiopia and Sierra Leone undergoing different forms. Besides the immediate pain and trauma FGM inflicts on its victims, it can result in infertility, incontinence, painful sexual intercourse and obstructed labour, in addition to severe psychological trauma. Groups such as Mali's *Association pour le progrès et la défense des femmes*, and others in Sierra Leone and Niger, have carried out intensive campaigns in cities and villages against the practice of excision.

The high and growing incidence of AIDS also highlights women's lack of power over their own sexuality. Research in West and Central Africa has shown that because of cultural and economic reasons, many women feel unable to refuse the sexual advances of partners even when they know they risk infection.

Poverty has pushed some young women between the ages of 15 and 25 into sex work, and many new cases are being reported from this group. In 1992, HIV prevalence rates of 15 to 20 per cent were reported for female sex workers in Nigeria. In Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, rates were between 10 and 15 per cent among women attending prenatal clinic.

HIV/AIDS infection is on the rise among women of childbearing age who



A women's literacy class in Mali: education for women advances their economic empowerment, and also promotes development more generally.

also are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. In Uganda and Zambia, the average life expectancy of both women and men has already declined because of the disease, and eight other countries are beginning to see similar effects. Women and girls bear the burden of caring for infected family members and for orphans and abandoned children, at the same time as governments have reduced expenditure for the health sector.

While reproductive health issues are important, there is also a need to focus on women's general well-being. For instance, infertility is a problem in parts of Central and East Africa, where 20 per cent of women aged 45-49 are estimated to be childless. Insufficient housekeeping money, desertions and divorce, stress and the insecurities of daily life also threaten women's mental health.

Issues of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence also are beginning to receive due attention in discussions of women's health. Among other groups, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), with chapters in Uganda, Ghana, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, is documenting the prevalence of violence against women. In Namibia and South Africa, women's groups are organizing around the issue of rape and demanding that offenders be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. They have called for action against the gender insensitivity that is often displayed by police officers and prosecutors and the courts in handling cases of rape and domestic violence.

In situations of conflict, refugee and displaced women and girls often have been sexually assaulted. In Liberia and

Rwanda, rape and torture were used as weapons of war. During the long war in Mozambique, women and girls faced extreme violence, including exposure to landmines and the severe dismemberment that resulted. Some women in refugee camps have been pushed into prostitution, while the conditions in and around camps have contributed to the spread of AIDS and tuberculosis. Health education, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and culturally appropriate services for survivors of rape and torture generally have not been available.

"Women of all ages

may be victims of violence in conflict, but adolescent girls are particularly at risk for a range of reasons, including size and vulnerability," noted Ms. Graça Machel of Mozambique in her 1996 report to the UN General Assembly, *The Impact of*

Armed Conflict on Children. She recommended, among other things, that clear and accessible systems should be established for reporting sexual abuse, that rape be punished, and that camps for refugees and displaced persons be designed to improve security for women and girls.

Overall, there has been slow progress in improving the health of

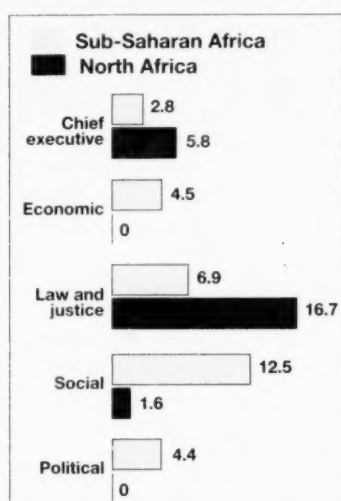
African women. Programmes to promote the health of mothers through maternal and childcare services and family planning services have been undercut by reductions in government expenditure in the health sector, shortages of drugs, scarcity of medical personnel and inadequate health infrastructure. Deteriorating environmental and economic conditions, the resurgence of old diseases (for example, yaws), and the rising incidence of AIDS could reverse the modest gains in women's health.

IV. Women's legal rights and political participation

Many governments have ratified conventions and international legal instruments on women's rights. Often, however, these have not been enacted into national law. Moreover, many women are ignorant of the existence of laws that recognize their rights and can be invoked for their protection. Various systems of customary law, religious ideologies and cultural stereotyping have been used to treat women as minors in the law and household, with few women able to inherit property in their own names or have equal access to political offices and positions. Socialization and educational processes reinforce this situation; women are raised to believe that they are inferior to men.

Traditional women leaders have not been given the same recognition as male chiefs who have been coopted into new positions of power in their societies. In Ghana, attempts to admit queen-mothers into the National House of Chiefs have been repulsed by powerful chiefs and their allies. But some women have fought back. In South Africa, the first woman Zulu chief in the province of KwaZulu/Natal won Supreme Court backing to defeat a challenge to her appointment. "She told us," remarked Acting Judge Navanetham Pillay, "that in African traditional practice, women keep their eyes lowered demurely. This is what she was doing, although she was the chief and men were [among] her subjects. One day she looked them in the eye, and never looked back."

Women in governmental decision-making (% of all positions, 1994)



Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank data

Traditional practices and attitudes toward women have carried over into public life. Women are under-represented in high offices of state and positions of decision-making in government, the military, central banks, finance and planning ministries and African regional organizations.

Average female representation in parliaments is less than 8 per cent in Africa, and many of the women are nominated, not elected. In only two countries, the Seychelles and South Africa, are women more than 25 percent of elected members in parliament or in ministerial positions, thus approaching the 30 per cent minimum threshold in decision-making for women recommended in UNDP's 1995 *Human Development Report*. Although they are active in community affairs, women also are not adequately represented in regional and local structures, except where conscious efforts have been made to guarantee a quota for them, as in Uganda, Ghana and Namibia.

Women's representation in judicial systems has improved through the growth in numbers of new female lawyers, but the proportions still tend to be low. In Kenya, females were 8.1 per cent of high court judges and 23 per cent of chief magistrates in 1992, while in Zambia, women were 11 per cent of the judiciary and 20 per cent of magistrates in 1993. In Uganda, women comprised 17 per cent of judges and 23 per cent of chief magistrates in 1994. Despite the presence of some women in judicial and parliamentary systems and in top ministerial and decision-making positions, their low numbers hamper their effectiveness in initiating change for women.

In the public service, women's representation at the highest levels of decision-making was 4.6 per cent in Kenya in 1992, 5.4 per cent in Swaziland in 1989, 4.6 per cent in Cote d'Ivoire in 1990, 12 per cent in Zambia in 1991 and 10 per cent in Senegal in 1993. In contrast, women in the Seychelles were 40 per cent of principal secretaries, director generals and deputy directors in the public service in 1994, thanks to affirmative action strategies for women.

Another important area for a greater presence of women is in the media. Females are about 45 per cent of students in third-level mass communication and documentation studies, and data from nine SADC countries shows that women are 27 per cent of the personnel in broadcasting and the press. Given

the role of the media in influencing people's opinions and attitudes, the increased participation of women, coupled with gender-sensitive education, can lead to more positive portrayals of women, their activities and their capabilities.

V. Women's responses

Since the start of the 1990s, many more women's associations have been formed or revitalized, and the quality of their work has improved significantly. Operating at both grassroots and national levels, these groups have taken advantage of new political openings in many countries to raise issues in new ways and to form alliances with other civil society groups to advance women's rights. While many of the associations receive external funding, a number seek to stress internal responsibility, African agenda-setting, and the development of

A women's group meets in Meru, Kenya: since the early 1990s, many women's associations have been formed or revitalized across Africa.



organizational potential. African women and gender studies programmes also have been set up in many universities, both to teach and to engage in fundamental and applied research to improve the conditions of women in Africa.

In contrast to the "development discourse" of the 1970s and 1980s, issues affecting women now are discussed most often within the framework of rights. Women have entered into debates and action on gender concerns that formerly were perceived as divisive and unpopular, such as violence against women, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and condom use by men, in addition to economic, political, legal and cultural issues.

Women have formed national committees on AIDS, health and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation.

lation and domestic violence. For example, The AIDS Support Organization (TASO), created in Uganda in 1987, has built a network of educators, counselling centres and support systems. It has established day-care centres, vocational training and community education to change the attitudes of health workers and community leaders, stressing safe sex and condom use among single and HIV-positive people.

Sub-regional and regional affiliations of women also have emerged and have identified key areas for action. They include the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), the Association of African Women Entrepreneurs (AFWE), the Federation of African Women Educators (FAWE), and WILDAF. They act as pressure groups, network with each other, form regional and global alliances and aim to direct resources and attention to women and the issues that concern them.

Women's World Banking and AFWE are active in many countries. They address the lack of credit for women entrepreneurs by acting as collateral grantees and providing matching funds to give poor women better credit access. Women's World Banking advocates the establishment of a continental bank for women.

FAWE brings together female ministers in charge of education, university chancellors, permanent secretaries and other influential women to work towards increasing girls' access to education in Africa. It also presses for implementation at national level of the strategies for educators and policy-makers contained in the Ouagadougou Declaration and UNESCO's Priority African Programme, which call for a regional consen-

sus on girls' education as a priority for development, outline a regional framework for action to improve girls' educational opportunities and seek to mobilize new resources and partners to support these goals.

Groups such as Emang Basadi in Botswana, the Forum for Women and Democracy in Uganda, the National Women's Lobby Group in Zambia and the Women's National Coalition in South Africa have all forced changes in political participation and the rights of women in their countries. The Women's National Coalition drew up a "Women's Charter" on gender equality, which

has been enshrined in the new South African constitution. The Women's Caucus in Uganda developed gender dialogues as a lobbying tool and has worked with other groups to form an Equal Opportunity Commission and to push for implementation of affirmative action programmes. These groups have held consultations with other women's groups from around Africa to share experiences, both of the obstacles that women face in politics and of successful strategies that might be replicated.

Women also are organizing on the issue of peace. They are demanding resources and legal recognition to rebuild their lives, as well as participation in peace-building, conflict-resolution and early warning mechanisms, citing both their traditional peace-making roles and their right to equal involvement. "Women can be peacemakers in our community not by standing with a gun, but by teaching peace," says Ms. Rebecca

Women's institutions in the community, market places and trades must be recognized and utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making in society.

ECA proposes 10 strategic actions

In preparation for its major conference on "African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future" on 28 April to 1 May 1998, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) proposed 10 strategic actions for reducing gender disparities and promoting the empowerment of women in Africa. The following are summaries:

1. Including a gender perspective in national accounts and other data: The non-market economy, which includes domestic and personal services produced by women, must be quantified and taken into account in the formulation and implementation of social and economic policies. Quantifying and reflecting women's social and economic contribution in statistics and economic indicators will contribute to policy-making and planning and ultimately to women's improved social status.

2. Making national budgets gender-sensitive: The budget is the most important economic policy instrument of government and has the potential of transforming countries to meet the needs of the poorest. National budgetary allocations therefore should be made in accordance with the priorities of the National Action plans prepared in conformity with the recommendations of the Beijing Global Platform of Action.

3. Expanding women's opportunities for entrepreneurship through the promotion of an enabling environment: Given the current state of inequality in women's access to, and participation in economic processes and structures, the Beijing Platform for Action recommends that women's economic rights be secured through promotion of women's self-reliance, including access to employment and control over economic resources.

4. Promoting women's access to and ownership of land: Access to and ownership of land is a matter of justice and survival in Africa. For women, the constraints to access and ownership are more severe due to legal discrimination and cultural practices. Mechanisms are needed to ensure that the rights of women to land are respected, assured and protected.

5. Ensuring access for women to information technology: Access to communication technologies is needed to enable women to participate more effectively in the economic development of their countries. Community-based women's information centres can help provide such technologies. This can enable women to link up with potential clients, partners, and markets and receive information on education (including distance learning), health and agricultural technologies, as well as other information

Akwaci, an organizer of the Sudan Women's Voice for Peace. "We can be on the borders, encouraging peace, talking about reconciliation instead of revenge."

The Federation of African Women's Networks — which groups women from Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, Angola, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, Mali and South Africa — stresses the missing social dimension in mechanisms for conflict-resolution, which currently emphasize more technical aspects over consultation with the people and communal action.

It is such growing organizations of women that are making a push for systemic changes in women's lives. Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and other NGOs must cooperate with them for meaningful change to occur, in the lives of women themselves and in society as a whole.

VI. The way forward

It is critically important for policy-makers to listen to and work with women to improve their positions and thereby accelerate Africa's development. A comprehensive approach must be taken by governments — in conjunction with development agencies and women themselves — to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women.

Regional actions on the model of those initiated by the Southern African Development Community are needed for implementing the African Common Position for the Advancement of Women and the Platform of Action adopted in Beijing. National action plans must be designed in broad

consultation with women's groups to complement regional initiatives. These must be adequately funded and staffed, however. Commenting on SADC's new institutional framework for gender, Ms. Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania, who served as Secretary-General for the Fourth World's Women Conference in Beijing, expressed the hope that it will be allocated sufficient resources, because "all too often, similar institutions have been marginalized, under-resourced and used as a dumping ground for gender issues."

An important issue raised in the Beijing Platform for Action is equality of responsibility between men and women for gender equality to become a reality. In order for more women to reach the same high positions as men in various fields, more focused education and socialization are needed for better burden-sharing and a fairer division of labour between the sexes in the home and society. Not only should governments' macroeconomic policies incorporate gender perspectives in their design, they also need to take into account intra-household differences in resource use and control, recognizing that improvements in women's incomes promote equity as well as child welfare.

Most economic programmes in Africa tend to overlook the unpaid economy, where women predominate. They also assume that males and females respond to incentives in the same way, thereby ignoring gender and power relations within households and communities. But gender biases and rigidities may strongly affect women's access to productive resources and markets, ultimately frustrating economic reform policies. It therefore makes economic sense to take into account gender biases and tailor planned interventions to improve women's

of relevance for the community.

6. Promoting affirmative action to ensure women's access to decision-making positions in the political arena: Since changes in society normally come through the political process, women's lack of political opportunities is a serious concern. A critical 30 per cent threshold should be regarded as a minimum share of decision-making positions held by women at the national level.

7. Ensuring gender-sensitivity and awareness: The foundation of gender discrimination and stereotyping that lead to decreased opportunities and lower status for women is often laid during childhood and adolescence. Therefore, in order to foster harmonious and accelerated development and social progress for future generations, it is important to inculcate values and attitudes that enhance gender awareness and sensitivity among girls as well as boys during this phase of life.

8. Instituting women-centered, community-based social insurance schemes: A majority of African women, especially in rural areas, have little access to accumulated wealth or community-based assets to guarantee continuous access to education and health care services. Since women generally are responsible for assuring health care and the provision of education for their children and other family members, such security of access will have a positive impact on the community as a whole.

9. Drawing up strategies and taking action for the implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): The Convention, which became effective in 1981, aims to remove all forms of discrimination against women to enable them to be equal partners in the processes of development. There is need for concerted action among all actors for the Convention to be implemented in African countries.

10. Creating mechanisms for the systematic participation of women in all peace processes at the national, regional and sub-regional level: Despite efforts by women to contribute to a resolution of conflicts in Africa, women are still absent from peace and security decisions, policy-making and action, constraining the achievement of comprehensive and sustainable peace. Measures need to be taken to increase women's participation, in both numbers and influence. Governments should commit themselves to ensuring that, by the year 2000, 50 per cent of national, regional and international delegations participating in activities concerned with peace and security are women. The UN also should commit itself to the same percentage for personnel in all preventive diplomacy, peace-making and post-conflict peace-building (including fact-finding and observer) missions, and in all stages of peace negotiations.

ability to take advantage of incentives, thus enhancing overall economic efficiency.

Access to resources

Governments and local authorities must demonstrate commitment to removing legal impediments and socio-cultural obstacles against women, especially in the rural areas where the majority of women live and are economically active. The constraints on women's access to land, credit, extension services, inputs and new technologies must be removed, and opportunities should be created for their enterprise. Measures to improve women's access through institutional reforms must be pursued and monitored for effectiveness.

Governments must build partnerships with the emerging associations of women bankers and entrepreneurs to create an enabling policy environment. This should include making credit available to women at affordable rates, with the private sector assisting government efforts to get credit to women.

Reducing labour time

Appropriate technologies for household chores, food processing, preservation and storage are needed, as are farm tools that are appropriate for women, including small transportation equipment that will free women from head loading. The increased provision of potable water and cheap and reliable energy sources are also needed to reduce the long hours that women work and to remove the drudgery from their lives.

Improving education and health

Gender biases in the educational system, training and employment must be consistently attacked to give women new opportunities for achievement, while school curricula must incorporate concepts of gender equality and peace at all levels, so that students will incorporate them throughout their lives. Young women need role models to motivate them and must be given a usable education and skills to play meaningful roles in soci-

ety and to safeguard them from harmful practices which mortgage their health and lives.

It is clear that there are interconnections between women's precarious health status, their susceptibility to AIDS, inequitable gender relations, and women's poverty and powerlessness in society. Without a frontal assault on all of these issues, medical solutions alone can have little effect. As Dr. Eka Esu Williams of Nigeria puts it, "To enable women to protect themselves there are three issues at stake: improving their social and economic status; providing a method over which they have sufficient control; or getting more men to adopt safe sex. This is not an academic exercise in setting priorities, but a question of life and death for many women."

Women's leadership and organization

Finally, women's leadership skills in their communities, groups and associations need to be harnessed and formalized to give them political and decision-making power. Women's commitment to their households, to local and national food security, local production and the environment should be reflected in equitable representation on all bodies that make decisions in these areas, as well as in broader economic programmes that affect women's lives.

Implementation mechanisms must harness women's own energies, through their associations. Technical units in government departments and ministries should be established, along with data banks and resource centres at local, regional and national levels to support actions on behalf of women — and they should be adequately funded and staffed. The viability of women's institutions and mechanisms for decision-making in the community, market places and trades must be recognized, and they should be utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making power in society. "If you want to develop Africa," affirms Ms. Soukeyna Ba of Senegal, "you must develop the leadership of African women." ■



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